ECUMENICAL PERSPECTIVES
ON
POLITICAL ETHICS

The Report of a Consultation
Ayia Napa Conference Center, Cyprus
October 18-25, 1981

World Council of Churches
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Preface

In 1976, the Central Committee of the WCC adopted four major programme emphases for its work following the Fifth Assembly at Nairobi in 1975:

1) The expression and communication of our faith in the triune God;

2) The search for a just, participatory and sustainable society (JPSS);

3) The unity of the Church and its relation to the unity of humankind; and

4) Education and renewal in search of true community.

In order to provide guidance on the second emphasis, the 1977 Central Committee appointed the JPSS Advisory Committee which submitted its report to the 1979 Central Committee (Jamaica). It elicited a mixed response and gave rise to difficult debate. Receiving the report, the Central Committee instructed Unit II and other sub-units concerned "to pursue the JPSS concern in cooperation and in their respective programmes in the coming years; their foci should be the study on political ethics, and the support of people's movements". The results of this pursuit were to "be brought together, as preparations proceed for the next Assembly, to facilitate the clearest possible consideration of the clusters of issues in the Assembly context". (Minutes, 1979 Central Committee Meeting, p. 18).

It was only a year later that the JPSS follow-up, with the focus on political ethics, modestly began to pick up. A small staff working group under the shared leadership of Unit II staff moderator and the director of the Commission on the Churches' Participation in Development (CCPD) has guided the work. Its secretariat was located in CCPD.

As an initial working definition, political ethics was understood as having to do with "an evaluation of the understanding and the exercise of power, in faithfulness to the Gospel, for the sake of social justice, human dignity and authentic community". Based on this minimal definition, a process of regional reflection and dialogue was set in motion, with the aim of surveying and assessing how Christians and churches in the various continents deal with the issue of political ethics in their respective situations. Meanwhile, relevant insights were solicited from major WCC conferences on: "Faith, Science and the Future", "Your Kingdom Come", "The Churches and Racism", and "The Community of Women and Men in the Church". In addition, cumulative wisdom was sought from the experience of many other commissions such as CCIA and CCPD.

The results from the above processes formed the input for a small consultation which met in Cyprus, October 18-25, 1981. The intention was more to explore the issue and work out future agenda than to produce a conclusive document.

Regrettably, in spite of our efforts to listen to all the major voices, the actual dialogue at the consultation lacked an adequate contribution from the Orthodox and the socialist experiences. On the other hand, pronounced perspectives based on actual if particular experiences strongly emerged and are reflected in this report.* The twenty-nine participants, plus ten staff, represented a fair geographical, confessional, sex, and age cross-section. (See list of participants appended).

Focusing on political ethics has proved worthwhile. It has served as a common concern on which a true dialogue has started, evoking keen interest across the various lines of contention.

During the consultation, after introducing the subject, two days were devoted to plenary discussions of four issues suggested by the Annotated Agenda: power and justice, identity and participation, sustainability, and ecumenical political ethics. Then the participants divided into three groups, choosing to focus on three issues: ecumenical political ethics, justice and power, and people's participation in politics. It was felt that the sustainability issue is a general aspect of all ethical action and behaviour, and as such it seemed appropriate to leave it out from a brief treatment of political ethics.

This report summarizes the actual discussion which took place at Cyprus; it is presented more as notes on the conversation than as a consensus statement. It begins, in part I, with the four initial assumptions for the discussion, a summary of Dr. Konrad Raiser's introduction to the consultation. Parts II, III and IV come out of the results of the three group discussions. Part V reconstructs some of the major methodologies operative in the whole process. And finally, Part VI puts together the various recommendations which the consultation has made to the WCC.

It is hoped that this initial report will contribute to the continuing search for a just, participatory and sustainable society in general and to the discussion of political ethics in particular. Towards this goal, we hope to bring out a volume on "Towards Ecumenical Political Ethics" early in 1983, making available selected papers prepared for the Cyprus consultation and what emerged out of it.

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* Perhaps the most clearly pronounced experience which was shared at the consultation is from Asia, where the notion of "People" has emerged as a new central symbol. Please refer to page 10 for a fuller explication.

I. BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

All over the world humankind faces a double and interlocking crisis: the crisis of justice and the crisis of order. At all levels of human existence, peace and survival are threatened, justice denied and dignity violated. In this situation, the poor and the oppressed people suffer most. Christian churches, together with communities of other living faiths, are also exposed to these threats and are challenged by them in their life and witness.

Hence the urgent need in many churches and within the ecumenical movement to search for a new articulation of a Christian political ethic. Recent experiences in the context of ecumenical programmes, especially on development, racism and militarism, have led the WCC to initiate a process to explore and identify elements for a Christian political ethic in an ecumenical perspective. This report is an account of the first phase in a debate which will have to continue.

A number of initial assumptions have guided the discussion and they need to be stated clearly at the beginning.

The first of these refers to a "minimal definition" of political ethics as put forward in the Annotated Agenda for the consultation: "An ecumenical political ethic has to do with the evaluation of the understanding and exercise of power, in faithfulness to the Gospel, for the sake of social justice, human dignity and authentic community."

Though this definition was not discussed as such, it served as an implicit point of reference to indicate a shift of ethical consciousness to a new emphasis on "justice, participation and peace/shalom" as guiding political criteria. This shift, however, does not invalidate the concerns for "order, stability and security". It simply implies that they need now to be seen from the perspective of justice and participation.

The discussion did not lead to a revised "definition" and it is clear that more work needs to be done to articulate the issue of a political ethic in relation to the field of political economy and to the concern for the sustainability of life under the conditions of modern science and technology.

The second initial assumption relates to the fact that the churches have diverse experiences in dealing with political questions due to different historical, cultural and political circumstances. Any attempt to articulate a political ethic is marked by the actualities of a particular situation. At the same time, all situations are influenced by worldwide political forces and events which impose their own dynamic and call for a common understanding and response.

In addition, Christians interpret political realities in their particular as well as their universal significance on the basis of a common confession, their shared faith in Jesus Christ and their shared hope for the Kingdom of God, all of which implies a common calling for political witness in the world. However, this also points to the fundamental ecumenical challenge: How are we to reconcile with this confession the diverse claims we make in the area of political action, apparently on the basis of the same confession? The conflicting character of the different truth-claims inherent in the many contextual articulations of a Christian political ethic constitutes an ecumenical task and must lead to a dialogical process of mutual questioning, listening and learning.

The third initial assumption is equally important. Christians are not alone in reflecting on a viable political ethic in the present human situation. Their search must remain open to dialogue with people of other religious and ideological convictions. It would be presumptuous for Christians to offer a blueprint for an ideal political order. The attempt to articulate elements of a Christian political ethic in ecumenical perspectives is meant in the first instance to serve Christians and churches in their own life and witness. The "political" life-style of the churches internally is an essential element of their witness in society.

The fourth assumption acknowledges that an ecumenical political ethic can only be an "ethic of responsible discipleship". This implies methodologically that it will constantly have to relate faithfulness and convictions to the probable consequences of actions guided by these convictions. It will also have to acknowledge the inter-relatedness of political goals and the means available for their implementation.

II. ECUMENICAL POLITICAL ETHICS

The debate at the consultation suggested that the search for an ecumenical political ethic moves through several areas of inquiry where different, and potentially conflicting affirmations encounter one another and where ecumenical dialogue is urgently required. These areas include the interpretation of the world political situation, the understanding of the biblical tradition, the approaches to political ethics, and the forms of Christian political witness.

1. Discerning the signs of the times

An ecumenical political ethic has to come to terms with the task of discerning the signs of the times, i.e. interpreting the significance of political events at all levels from a Christian perspective, as these affect Christians and churches in their different situstions. The ecumenical Christian community responds to the political situation with a special sensitivity to the sufferings of people everywhere. In practice, however, Christians respond in different and sometimes contradictory ways to world political events, reflecting different contexts, experiences,

interests, fears and hopes. The ecumenical movement has contributed to a sharpening of critical awareness of world political issues among the churches and has drawn them into the difficult task of discerning the signs of the times through mutual exposure and accountability. This is an essential element in any effort at articulating an ecumenical political ethic.

The participants at the consultation came from very different parts of the world. In reviewing recent political developments on the world level a common perception began to emerge focusing on a number of issues which have critical significance.

a. Militarization

The militarization of human societies has reached a level where the very survival of humankind is threathened; and yet, the arms race continues. Military expenditures worldwide have exceeded a total of 500 billion US dollars per year. Since the Second World War more than 130 wars have been fought, all in regions of the Third World. The likelihood that atomic weapons will first be used in conflicts in the southern hemisphere is growing.

The process of developing military technology has generated a momentum which increasingly determines political decisions and contributes to accelerating militarization of politics. There are signs of a return to an analysis of world politics in cold war terms, placing excessive emphasis on military power and security.

In this situation it is imperative to reaffirm the authentic value of political life in all societies and to search for new forms of political cooperation and resolution of conflict in non-military terms. In the industrialized countries, there is an urgent need to find effective ways of working for disarmament, especially in the area of nuclear weapons, for de-militarization and for stopping the expansion of the arms trade among nations. Peace movements in some nations and indications of a growing awareness among the people are among the few signs of hope that have emerged. In the developing countries, people struggle against the effects of militarization manifested by the spread of national security systems and the establishment of military dictatorships which distort social and econmic development and suppress the rights of people.

b. Awakening of people

It is a remarkable sign of our time that in many situations hitherto silent and oppressed people have begun to wake up and to grasp the realities of their political condition. They speak out against oppression and, with their own voice, express their authentic hopes and aspirations for a new political future. Some have begun to organize themselves in order to determine their own political destiny.

Many such movements must face the brutal forces unleashed by oppressive structures. However, once the suffering people have seized a new hope, a political dynamic is generated which cannot be entirely suppressed. The voices of the people form a new and important element in interpreting the present political processes at national and international levels.

c. Political processes and international economic structures

The present international monetary system came into being at the end of the Second World War in order to preserve economic stability in the Western world. Today this system has become a major obstacle in the way of human development, especially in the southern hemisphere. Its maintenance absorbs vast political energies. It progressively eliminates the autonomy of political life by making political processes and decisions exclusively dependent upon economic logic and calculus.

Under the present pattern of international political economy, industrialized countries are facing growing and chronic unemployment, inflation, environmental problems, unsustainability of systems of public welfare and resulting internal political pressures. The same world economic process reduces political life in the developing countries to an endless struggle for economic survival.

As a consequence of this situation it is being realized by a growing number of politicians and economists that a new understanding of the world economy has to be developed and that political life has to be liberated from economic determinism by reordering the relationship between economic means and political goals.

d. Struggle for self-determination in the interdependent world

Most nations and peoples of the world suffer from growing global tensions and conflicts. Many countries are in fact locked in systems of hostile military alliances. The structure of the East-West conflict have been transferred from the Northern hemisphere and imposed on countries in the South as well, even though the futility of such conflict is recognized, since the security of both sides is increasingly being threatened. More and more countries are trying to affirm their independence from the two leading super-powers and to work towards instruments which offer security and peace for all. For more than twenty years a vision of non-alignment has persisted especially among developing countries. It has inspired their struggle for self-determination even though the vision is yet to be fully appropriated, providing a new alternative.

e. Growing role of political religion

One of the signs of the times particularly important for the Christian community is the emergence of political systems which fuse together religious authority and political power. In such systems, political power becomes absolutized and people's rights to determine their own political future are set aside.

Religious and political minorities are thus seriously threatened. This poses a challenge to any political ethic, Christian or otherwise, which perceives a dialectic relation between religion and politics and thus recognizes the validity of a critical religious witness in the political field.

2. Reconstruction of the common Christian confession

A new exploration of a Christian political ethic in an ecumenical perspective is confronted with the double fact that any Christian ethic is rooted in the common biblical tradition and that this same tradition is understood and used in different and sometimes conflicting ways. The ecumenical movement has been guided by the affirmation of the Lordship of Christ over all realms of life. But what are the concrete political implications of this confession? Time and again, initiatives taken and statements made by ecumenical bodies have been challenged on the ground that they are not in accord with the witness of the Scriptures. The credibility of the common witness of the churches is at stake in this debate.

During the discussion at the consultation the need for a clear biblical frame of reference was recognized. This is all the more important since some churches and Christian traditions have not developed a conscious, systematic approach to the problems of a social and political ethic, out of respect for the freedom of conscience of the individual believer. For them the common biblical tradition remains the only unamibiguous reference point. A determined ecumenical effort has to be made, therefore, to root the leading ideas and concepts of a contemporary ecumenical political ethic in the biblical witness. To what extent can biblical symbols help us in the interpretation of political reality? The following paragraphs are a summary of the suggestions and insights which emerged in the course of the consultation. It should be underlined that this is only the beginning of a discussion which will have to continue.

a. Emphasis on a holistic understanding of the biblical witness

In the past, Christian approaches to political ethics have often been based on one particular aspect of the biblical tradition, e.g. the Pauline thinking, especially his advice in Romans 13. Repeatedly it was affirmed during the consultation that the biblical witness has to be holistically interpreted and understood. This holistic approach rejects absolutizing particular aspects, accepts and makes creative use of contextual differences, and most importantly focuses on the Bible's testimony to Jesus Christ and God's messianic Kingdom. Furthermore, it calls for a conscious effort to keep together creation and fall, the understanding of the human person created in the image of God and marred by human sinfulness, salvation through conversion and forgiveness of sins and the beginning of new creation transforming the old order of things, the cross and the incarnation of Christ, his resurrection and the gift of the Spirit and - not least - the Old and the New Testaments.

This emphasis on wholeness, which has been present in the ecumenical movement since its beginning, does not deny the existence of tensions between the various elements in the biblical witness; however, it tries to avoid any separation, e.g. of two kingdoms, and the establishment of any antithetical opposition between the diverse elements.

b. History and eschatology

The emphasis on wholeness becomes particularly important with regard to the relationship between human history and the eschatological promise and hope. This was one of the special difficulties encountered in the efforts of the earlier Advisory Group on a "Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society" whose work had preceded the present discussion on political ethics. The consultation did not enter into this difficult theological debate in any detail. However, there was general support for the affirmation made that as Christians we are part of two realities, the historical reality of political events and the eschatological reality of messianic promise and hope.

The concrete, particular historical reality and the universal eschatological reality must be kept together; any separation should be avoided. Yet these two realities are not identical; all human action in history remains relative and is subject to critical judgement in the light of God's action in fulfilling his eschatological promise. As one participant said: "We live on Saturday, between the Friday of the crucifixion and the Sunday of the resurrection. The real question is how can we walk tall and upright without having yet seen the final fulfilment of the resurrection from the dead?". The hiddenness of the eschatological reality under the contradictions of historical reality is a crucial point for any discussion about a Christian political ethic.

c. Two key symbols

During the Cyprus discussion, two central biblical symbols emerged as particularly relevant. The first of these is the Old Testament symbol of the covenant community. Here, the right relationship between God and his people is the focus for the biblical understanding of justice, righteousness and peace/shalom.

Justice here is a relational concept and the central criterion for the exercise and control of power. Justice is realized in the protection of the poor, the widows, the orphans, the strangers as part of the community of the covenant. Justice does not aim at simple equality or equity in the distribution of goods, but at the establishment of peace/shalom between God and his people, between members of the community and even between human beings and God's creation. The rediscovery of the notion of the "people of God" as an image of the Church in recent ecumenical discussions about ecclesiology has important implications for a Christian political ethic. But beyond its ecclesiological validity the symbol of the people, the community of the covenant, opens important perspectives for interpreting political realities.

It offers an alternative to the traditional organic understanding of state and society, including the relationship between church and state, or church and society as symbolized in the Pauline image of the body. It places the central emphasis on the participatory, cooperative, or - as it was put during the consultation - the "federalist" nature of the political community. The consultation was convinced that this approach should be further developed.

The second symbol is related to the first, but it has its own distinct identity and integrity: it is the New Testament notion of the messianic kingdom, the messianic community of the new covenant in Jesus Christ. This New Testament symbol builds on the covenant tradition. But it projects a community without power of domination, the fulfilment of the promise that God will live among his people, that the people will reign with the Messiah. Its historical manifestation is the community gathered under the cross of the suffering Messiah, the community of those moved by love, placing their hope in the transforming power of the cross. It is an eschatological symbol: it cannot be converted into a political ideology to be realized historically. Its importance is that it provides a critical perspective for interpreting political history and a vision of hope beyond historical hopes. Thus it can become a powerful force within the historical realm of political contradictions.

Recent ecumenical discussions within the World Council of Churches, (e.g. in the context of the Melbourne Conference on "Your Kingdom Come" 1980, as well as within certain regional and national contexts, e.g. Minjung theology in Korea), have underlined the significance and value of this symbol for the effort of reconstructing the biblical basis for a contemporary Christian political ethic.

3. Approaches to political ethics

a. In search of a political ethic

As noted earlier, nations and communities are facing the crisis of justice and the crisis of order. This in a new way and with a new sense of urgency. Many interlocking factors are behind this double crisis. Firstly, the new alliance and concentration of power, based on the control of modern science and technology and the will to profit and domination, have not only blocked justice but also seriously threatened peace and survival.

Secondly, the emergence of socialism has presented a threat to some and a promise to others. For still others, socialism has lost its charms. Nevertheless it has brought about fundamental changes which have to be taken into account in rethinking a political ethic.

Thirdly, in spite or perhaps because of the two challenges mentioned above, poor and oppressed people have begun to assert themselves, struggling to participate in the creation of a new and viable social order. Fourthly, on top of all these, there

is also the challenge of renascent religions making ideological and political claims, along with new coalitions of religious and political power.

Finally, in the midst of all these, Christians and churches in their particular historical and cultural contexts find themselves struggling to be faithful to their religious confession on the one hand and to be contextually authentic on the other. This is especially important when it comes to their participation in politics. All these point to an urgent need to rearticulate an ecumenical political ethic.

b. The influence of the churches in public and political life

A variety of approaches to the issues of a Christian political ethic emerged in the consultation processes. Descriptively one can distinguish between a church-centred, a politics-centred, and a people-centred approach. The three represent different but not mutually exclusive emphases.

The first approach, a legacy of the earlier phases of the ecumenical discussion, can be called church-centred, with a strong emphasis on the churches' influence in public and political life. Based on the commandment of love for our neighbour, this approach recognizes political authorities as ordained by God to establish and preserve a just order of society under his rule. This usually means for Christians loyal and responsible participation in the work of governments. The nature of that participation depends on the type of state. When active participation is impossible, the responsibility of Christians may have to be expressed, in extreme cases, in resistance to a particular government, often at great cost to themselves because of their obedience to God rather than the rulers of this world.

c. The value and the legitimacy of politics

The second approach was represented at the consultation particularly by participants coming from churches in Europe and North America; it would probably also apply to Australia and New Zealand. This approach, in comparison with earlier ecumenical positions, is more clearly politics-centred and much less preoccupied with the institutional issues of church-state relationships. It focuses on two dominant concerns, i.e. the value of politics in the total context of society, and the legitimacy of political structures and decisions.

In the face of the growing disintegration of the political process it has become imperative to re-examine the goals of politics and the functions of the state at national and international levels.

Politics as a process of people's participation needs to be emphasized over against economic, military and other criteria.

This will be possible only if the political process is once again clearly related to ultimate social goals which, from a

Christian perspective, are represented by the values of justice and peace in their inseparable relationship; human dignity embracing freedom and equality and the protection of life; human rights, including the satisfaction of basic human needs, the right to free association, self-determination and dissent.

Political ethics following this approach has further to do with the legitimacy of political structures and decisions. The Churches have always affirmed that political powers ultimately stand within the sovereignty of God and are accountable to his law. This conviction was elaborated further with the help of the tradition of natural law. More recently, legitimation in the Western democratic tradition was based on the notion of due process and proper procedure. However, there is growing evidence that procedural legitimation, independent of the recognition of common values, can be used to defend almost any policy. The loss of validity of these forms of legitimation leads to a general loss of trust among the people in the political process and in those carrying a political mandate.

In this context a Christian political ethic must give renewed attention to the protective as well as creative function of law. In national situations the growing complexity of the life of society radically challenges the credibility of laws. Legislation will have to be developed further in order to incorporate new political values and goals. Internationally there is a clear need for the development of a "new international legal order" continuing the tradition of international law.

A final point which is important from this perspective concerns the relationship between religion/faith and politics. It was felt that the distinction between religion and politics, as it has been developed in many parts of the world, including the Western tradition, should be maintained and defended over against tendencies towards a new sacralization of politics. The principle of religious liberty was considered a crucial criterion for an ecumenical political ethic since it provides the basis for a critical, prophetic stance and, where called for, opposition and resistance to the political powers. It is clear, however, that distinction does not mean total separation. The Christian community cannot abdicate its political responsibility.

d. Political aspirations of the people

The third general approach to political ethics is based on a perception of political reality which focuses on the aspirations of the people. The term "people" as a new category was introduced consciously into the discussion in order to point to a new political reality: the awakening of the people who have hitherto only been the silent objects or victims of political power. The term "people", particularly when translated into some languages, is not free from ambiguity. It should not be surprising, however, that the appropriate term is not readily available to identify a political reality which was largely absent even from earlier ecumenical approaches to political ethics.

Various attempts were made to unfold the meaning of the term "people" or to communicate the experience which is crystallized around this term. There is agreement that "the people" are not simply all citizens of a given political community. Some employ a certain form of class analysis: the term then refers to the common people, to workers, peasants, to the exploited classes. Others start from a more political analysis: here the term "people" refers to the ruled vs. the rulers, to the oppressed vs. the oppressors, to the powerless vs. those who are in control of political power. Sometimes the "people" are considered identical with the "deprived, oppressed and poor" in society.

Over against these more negative formulations it was strongly stated during the consultation that the importance of the term is related to its positive function of affirming the cultural, political and religious identity of the people as subjects of their own history over against imposed social and political patterns. The cultural-political dimension of the term is thus considered more important than its social-economic meaning. The purpose of a people-centred political ethic, therefore, is to affirm the importance of the people, of those who are often considered as non-people and who feel like strangers in their own land. It has to do with the reconstruction of the people's history and the articulation of a new political destiny.

From this perspective, the paramount feature of political reality, particularly in the developing countries, is that the process of nation-building has not led to a just society and legitimate forms of government; rather, political power is widely being exercised without any effective participation of and control by the people. The classical models of legitimation, inherited from the colonial powers, have broken down or no longer function. Instead of striving to restore the imported framework of political process, people begin to rediscover their own forms of political life rooted in their own culture, reinterpreted and reappropriated by the people themselves.

A Christian political ethic in this situation draws its inspiration from the hope that the messianic kingdom represents the ultimate destiny of the struggle of the people and, at the same time, remains the criterion of human responsibility. It seeks to articulate a new vision of political life among the people and to practise new forms of political community. It does not simply work for a "transfer of power" or the "empowerment of the people", but rather for the transformation of political power under the image of the cross of Jesus Christ, the suffering Messiah.

This approach to political ethics is sometimes articulated from within extreme national situations where political power has lost all legitimacy and has turned into extreme oppression. In such situations, the Christian community, following this line, must renounce all political calculation and, for the sake of its own integrity as well as the integrity of the political life of the people, make its political witness through resistance to the powers that be.

4. Political witness of the churches in ecumenical solidarity

While recognizing the differences of contexts, of perceptions of political realities, and of approaches to political ethics among the participants, the consultation felt that the possibilities of common political witness by the churches should be seriously explored and that the lines of active ecumenical solidarity should be strengthened. Rather than developing a blueprint for an ideal political order or defining "middle axioms" for an ecumenical political ethic, the consultation considered witness and solidarity as the areas needing priority attention in the further process. The following observations are offered as a contribution to this search for a "living political ethic".

a. The political involvement of the churches

Wherever they are, the churches are part of the given political reality, be it by conscious political involvement in many different ways or without acknowledging their role. All churches, therefore, must examine the integrity and faithfulness of their political witness and involvement, in the light of the common confession, through mutual critical dialogue and encouragement. They also need to broaden their perceptions of political realities and their political analyses. They can learn from their respective experiences of political witness and actively support each other in their political actions through the exchange of ecumenical delegations, by providing each other with authentic information, by making representations on behalf of other churches to their governments, etc. Various forms of ecumenical solidarity have been developed within and between the churches, like public intercession on behalf of detained persons and oppressed people, open prayer meetings with the families of victims of political oppression, acts of worship, and symbolic actions expressing solidarity with people in their struggle.

b. The political dimension of the Gospel

Because the churches are part of the political reality, they cannot escape their accountability in the exercise of their own role within that reality. The Gospel has an inescapable political dimension which manifests itself most clearly where it is proclaimed under conditions of extreme oppression. There, the Gospel inspires and sustains the oppressed; the Bible can even become a subversive book in the eyes of the oppressor. This is due to the clear bias in the biblical witness in favour of the oppressed, the poor, those under domination and without power. The mutual encounter of churches in the ecumenical movement helps them to grow in faithfulness to the biblical witness, to discover possibilities for common prophetic witness and service, and to renew the forms and styles of life of their own communities in accordance with the biblical imperative.

c. Suffering with the people as political witness

As followers of Jesus Christ, the suffering servant, the churches in the ecumenical community are called upon to share in the pain of the world. The incarnation of God in Christ found its

fulfilment on the cross, which is the symbol of the power of love against the love of power; ecumenical solidarity can take the form of an "incarnational" participation in the suffering of the people as they seek to transform their political predicament. The suffering of the people constitutes in itself a witness against the illegitimacy of power, crying out not only for its rectification but for a fundamental transformation. There are special situations where martyrdom is again becoming a form of Christian witness with political implications.

d. Encouraging Christians in their political vocation

As citizens and as followers of Jesus Christ, Christians are called to a political vocation; i.e. active participation in politics. Many have accepted this vocation in various capacities, depending on their national situations. The churches should acknowledge them more fully and provide them with appropriate support and criticism. For example, churches and the ecumenical movement can help clarify the ethical criteria for political participation and responsibility.

e. Focal points of political action by the churches

The following points might serve as additional ethical indications in determining the forms and focal areas of political action by the churches:

- the churches should be prepared to assist and support the victims of political decisions and to intervene, where possible, with governmental authorities on their behalf;
- in situations where the human rights of people are systematically and continuously being violated, the political action of the churches should go beyond assistance and efforts to rescue the victims; it must address the root causes and structural origins of such violations of human rights;
- under all circumstances, and whatever the given relationship to the political structures may be, all churches are called upon to bear witness to the truth. Beginning with the transformation of their own life and structures, the churches are called to be "the salt of the earth" as well as the "light of the world";
- the integrity and dignity of politics should be respected, maintained, and, where undermined, restored. At the same time, persons in political office have to be reminded of their proper tasks and responsibilities.

Conclusion

In the foregoing sections of this report profound differences of perspective, approach and context have been clearly acknowledged. At the same time, it was affirmed that the churches share in an emerging global political reality, a common confession of faith, common ethical convictions and commitments, and in the search for a new political vision. The various contextual approaches to the issues of a Christian political ethic are not

limited in their validity to the respective context alone. They have wider implications for the practice of the political vocation of the people of God in other situations, for broadening the bases of common understanding and for mutual accountability. In this connection a special plea was made for strengthening, with the help of the ecumenical fellowship, the interlinkage between the churches and Christian communities living in similar situations in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and other regions of the southern hemisphere.

III. THE ISSUES OF JUSTICE AND POWER

1. Contexts

The various inputs prepared for the Cyprus Consultation on political ethics made it clear that religion and politics are always intertwined. However a church defines its relationship to the state, it has implications for the way power is exercised and legitimized. This was accepted as a truism. Therefore the consultation focused on particular contexts which revealed aspects of the nature of power and how it works.

In many contexts people are powerless because the dominating power of the state is too centralized, and thus repressive, controlled by transnational capital. Access to the exercise of power is limited to the ruling elite--like business people, politicians, military, police and intellectuals, etc. "People's power" in such situations comes primarily from the organized efforts of the people to confront this system of domination. Allies in the struggle of the people for justice and participation are on the side of people's power. There was general agreement that the role of the churches ought to be supportive of the people in their attempt to overcome their powerlessness. Often, however, churches are part of the power structure and not sympathetic to the goal of recovering the history, culture and spirituality of the people.

In other contexts there is a feeling that state power can reflect most of the interests of the population in spite of the lack of electoral parliamentary democracy. In such cases the churches can affirm the role of the state in meeting human needs and critically cooperate with the state in the pursuit of peace and justice.

At the Vth Assembly of the WCC (Nairobi, 1975), it was stated that power "is to be conceived as the capability to orient and to implement decisions. This capability can be of economic, political, ideological and/or military nature, being all these components in a dynamic interrelation among themselves" (Breaking Barriers, p. 129). Since the Nairobi Assembly the churches have deepened their perception about problems related to power. On the one hand, the interlinkages among different kinds of powers have become more clear; in our present world dominating power is often a constellation of financial, technological, military powers combined with international alliances. Such constellations of power exist among groups or countries who sometimes have

different ideologies. Generally these alliances aim to keep and to extend control of the situation. On the other hand, there are manifestations of people's power which express the aspiration of popular sectors in society to overcome injustice in structures of domination and dependence.

People's power becomes decisive when it grows to the point of a consolidated people's organization based on awareness of the unjust situation, clarity of goals and commitment to structured corporate action. In this process unity among the people is very important. Unity of people demands the building and joining up of social forces. At some point, changes in quantity also become qualitative changes. Through the pooling of forces, powerlessness can become meaningful political power. In order to achieve this it is necessary to remain open to dialogue, and to exercise a good deal of flexibility. It is not through theological dogmatism that people's power can be built up.

People's power is a necessary instrument for the achievement of justice. People who suffer injustice long for equity and respect for human rights. It is the persistance of people's movements in this kind of struggle which has contributed to the change in public feeling about apartheid, imbalances in the distribution of wealth, the violation of human rights, etc. The vision of a just society has nurtured and sustained people in their persistent effort to change structures and institutions.

People's movements for social justice are called to exemplify in their own life, organization and action the values which they profess: participation, justice and human dignity. However, people's movements are not always organized in a participatory way. Political ethics calls for coherence between ends and means. If this does not exist, it is difficult to avoid opportunistic behaviour.

History proves that parliamentary regimes come about because people are ready to struggle for them. However, stories were also told of the lack of participation and justice in spite of structures of parliamentary democracy and the widespread assumption that people have access to power. It was noted that such societies have experienced a deepening crisis, with unemployment rates growing and social differentiation increasing. The signs of the times call for a reaffirmation of the commitment to view each situation from the standpoint of the victims and to give a high priority to the empowerment of people's movements.

A participatory society at the end of the twentieth century calls for improvement of democratic forms of social organization. The quest for democracy is at the heart of the political struggles of our times, when we are becoming aware of the shortfall of both liberal and centralized democracies. Growing uneasiness among people is revealing the inability of existing structures and institutions to provide space for people's participation. The concentration of power in our time is such that new forms for the sharing and the control of power are needed. The search

for these forms must be a major point in future reflection on ecumenical political ethics.

2. Issues

Some of the issues which emerged from the discussion are:

a. Confrontation and violence

When a people's movement is organized and engaged in the struggle for justice, they often experience repression by established powers. They discover that normal channels of democratic participation are blocked. Then, for the sake of justice, confrontation (in its manifold forms) is the only way forward. Confrontation does not always imply violence; however, in many situations there is a temptation to oppose military power with the same kind of power in a grossly unequal struggle.

Violence is no doubt a major issue in political ethics. The whole dilemma of nonviolence versus violence has remained an unsolved problem for the churches. It is obvious, however, that for Christians priority must be given to nonviolence, recognizing that there are times when people may need to turn to revolutionary violence. In the final analysis, the problem is not violence versus nonviolence, but how to confront illegitimate powers which create injustice.

In the history of human struggle, there are situations where nonviolence can become an expression of power in the search of justice. It is not possible to deal in abstract terms with these questions: the context within which the decision on nonviolence or violence is of vital importance. For example, it must be recognized that some prevailing expressions of the doctrine of national security mean a growth in state repression prompting further violent responses.

Because of the suffering, the pain, and the human waste which result from violent confrontations it is essential to recognize the role of negotiations and other techniques in the process of fostering justice and resisting injustices. Space for de-escalation of violence must be allowed. Nonetheless, within the ambiguities of politics, many people find it difficult to dismiss the option of violence.

The issue of violence and nonviolence is not new to the WCC. (SEE: "Violence, Nonviolence and the Struggle for Social Justice", Ecumenical Review, WCC Geneva, October, 1973). But it is also clear that this issue must be given renewed attention.

b. Latent strength

The common people, especially the poor and the oppressed, long for well-being, justice and peace. It is in search of these goals that their power, usually latent, is manifested.

Facing injustice or indignity, or otherwise inspired, this latent strength is unleashed. Its expression ranges from silent pro-

test to taking up arms for revolutionary changes. For sure the dominant powers do not want this power unleashed; if necessary they will do anything to repress it. The issue is further complicated by the nagging question as to how it may be ensured that the people themselves will not become tyrannical once they gain control of power. It needs to be pointed out that this kind of question has been too often asked to perpetuate unjust situations.

c. Economics and politics

Prevailing economic systems--with their emphasis on growth, social stability, capital intensive technology, inputs and order at all levels--have created the national security systems which in turn give priority to economic performance instead of seeking well-being for all. National security is valued by international economic systems. Regimes big and small are caught in the situation where economic considerations dominate politics. This has negative effects on political life because the will to economic and military power becomes the guiding principle. There is thus a necessity for economics once again to become political economy, with primary emphasis on the overall direction of society. Basic changes in human values are a prerequisite for such a transformation.

d. Legitimacy and power

Is power legitimate when it is established on the basis of force? Is power legitimate when it has the consent of the people? Can power be legitimate when it does not provide more justice to the deprived? Do elections give a sound basis for the legitimization of power, especially when they are manipulated, or only a minority can take part in them?

Legitimacy is often taken for granted. But it is often necessary to challenge the concept of legitimacy. The source of legitimacy is the people, not the governments or the anonymous power which operates through transnational corporations, or even ideologies. It is necessary to indicate that governments can lose legitimacy in the people's eyes, and that it is valid to have a concept of de-legitimization of authority, so as to create alternative power. Since there are illegitimate powers, it is important to promote and formulate criteria for legitimacy - such as justice, participation, the respect and promotion of basic human rights and human dignity.

e. Disunity in the struggle

Where churches have attempted to support the oppressed, sometimes groups being supported have split and made competing demands. Such cases highlight the need for competence in analyzing the situation and for ethical criteria. They imply that very difficult choices must be made. Sometimes outside support precipitates the split among people.

f. Domination by international power systems

The pervasiveness of the dominant international systems means that both the direction and pace of development of national power of the weaker states are determined by the international agenda. Other routes are often restricted, and self-reliance is not a ready option.

3. Spirituality

Throughout history people have manifested their spiritual strength, resisting injustice and paying a very high price in the struggle for change and participation. This spiritual strength has been expressed in songs, poems, stories, etc. Clearly, spiritual power cannot be ignored in any consideration of political ethics. It is precisely here that religious communities, Christian churches in particular, can make a contribution.

What is the source of this spiritual power? For Christians, the Bible in the guidance of the holy spirit is clearly the most important. Yet, different social and personal background can lead to different ways of relating to the biblical message. Christian symbols can also play a political role in people's struggles. For example, the cross symbolizes God in Christ bringing salvation, and liberation from sin, to all people, reconciling them to God and among persons and communities. Politically speaking, for some people the cross symbolizes the unavoidable defeat, even death, which is inherent in all power struggles. However, defeat and death can be faced because the cross was followed by the resurrection of the crucified Christ. That is, Christian symbols can help people to keep their commitment, and not give up. Moreover, the cross is the symbol of freedom to face defeat and death, the source of ethical courage in political action.

Others place more stress on the spiritual significance of the awakening of peoples. The stories of persons who have experienced a conversion from being nobody to somebody, from being an isolated victim to a sister or a brother in a people's movement, tell a religious story. Through such living stories, it should be possible to do theology in our day.

Although such stories cannot be questioned, there is a need to reflect further on them. Is it a life-giving story? Is the dynamism of kenosis - one's own life given to others - manifested through political action? Are their actions compatible with the individual and social rights necessary for a self-reliant, sustainable human life? Is their enthusiasm linked to appropriate strategies for social change?

Spiritualities are experienced, nurtured, tested and invigorated in communities. As with their relation to people's movements, the churches sometimes facilitate and sometimes frustrate the search for a spirituality in political action. We are convinced that the Spirit of God is awakening peoples who have been oppressed. This Spirit reinforces and challenges, gives peace and kindles moral outrage. If it is the Spirit of God, it will transform

the power of domination into a relational, co-creative power directed towards justice, participation and shalom.

IV. PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

1. The issue of people's participation

The search for friendship, community (koinonia) and shalom has always been an integral and inspiring force in human history. The concern for people's participation, which has in recent years gained recognition in ecumenical and international agenda, is but a modern version of this same search. It is timely that this theme regains its rightful place. For the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the few, the more demonic side of the lack of people's participation, has made most people poor and powerless. They have been deprived, marginalized, excluded, oppressed and alienated. They have been rendered objects, without voice and power in the decisions which affect their very lives. This lack of effective and meaningful participation of the people is both the manifestation and the root cause of the injustice which prevails today.

Like poverty and affluence, the lack of people's participation and the monopoly of wealth and power are the two faces of an unjust social order. This injustice takes different forms in different countries, regions and ideological blocs. But its effect is the same; it creates apathy, loss of cultural identity, and threats to peace and survival.

The poor and oppressed people have not always taken this unjust situation lying down. In fact, they have stood up and struggled. Their vision, at its best, is no less than fundamental social transformation, moving toward a just society. But this struggle is indeed difficult and costly. For apart from apathy, ignorance and fear among their own ranks, poor people are faced with technologically sophisticated weaponry and extremely well-financed and well-organized systems of suppression on the part of the exploiter. Besides, various imported and self-perpetuating lies have been told to legitimize the unjust situation.

In the light of this situation, the ecumenical movement must ask: What are the spiritual resources in the Christian faith and in other religious traditions that would enable humanity to break out of its present structural captivity? What are the foundations on which a just, participatory and sustainable order can be built?

One of the most important elements of the ecumenical answer to these questions centres around the concept of people's participation. But what do we really mean by people's participation? What constitutes authentic participation? Do any and all forms of mass involvement constitute people's participation? What are the conditions and requirements for authentic participation? Participation in what and for whom? And finally, what about participation within the churches? What is the role of the churches in promoting authentic people's participation? What

biblical and theological wisdom do we have? These are some of the questions we posed at the Cyprus consultation. Obviously, a full discussion was not possible, and the process needs to continue.

2. People's participation in politics

The particular concern at the Cyprus Consultation was from the perspective of political ethics. Our focus was therefore on people's participation in political decisions.

What do we mean by people's participation in general? People's participation cannot simply mean their participating in the programmes or activities initiated, or worse, imposed by dominant classes in the nations or by imperialist powers. Rather, authentic participation has to do with people becoming the makers and shapers of their own history. Therefore, people's participation aims at people's power to act in order to liberate themselves from all forms of bondage and oppression on the one hand and to create a new community of justice and dignity, self-reliance and identity, freedom and compassion, friendship and celebration on the other. This, of course, presupposes that people's basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, health care, education and employment are adequately met.

And what do we mean by people's participation in political decisions? We mean people's participation in the exercise of power to create a just society. It implies the guaranteed right and power to initiate, create, choose and exercise legitimate control over the issues pertaining to the life and well-being of society. It requires involvement in the political process from decision-making to action. It seeks to improve the human condition, to respect people's cultural roots, to stimulate indigenous creativity and the wisdom of the people, to uphold the right to one's identity and creative self-fulfilment, the right to dissent and the opportunity to share in the life of the community.

In short, political participation is a way of empowering people to become viable members of a community. To participate is to belong and to have a stake in the community while working for the common good, leading to justice and peace. We advocate participation not only in terms of an inalienable right but also in terms of a climate and structure in which people are able and feel the duty to participate. Authentic participation is koinonia, where the people not only share what is to be had but joyfully celebrate life in its fullness together.

At the same time, in discussing people's participation in politics, we need to recognize the reality that in power politics where the rulers have claimed the right to act "for" the people, there is little or no room for the people to participate. Here the notion of people's power and participatory politics as new and alternative political space, especially at the grassroots and national level, is worthy of consideration. Ultimately

faithful to the crucified Christ, Christians are free to identify completely with poor and oppressed people; completely identified with the people, Christians transcend all political regimes.

3. The churches and people's participation

Why should the churches take seriously the issue of people's participation?

> Jesus went around visiting all the towns and villages. He taught in the synagogues, preached the Good News about the Kingdom, and healed people with every kind of disease and sickness. As he saw the people, his heart was filled with compassion for them, because they were worried and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd (Matt. 9:35-36).

As disciples of Jesus, Christians and the churches must be "filled with compassion for the people". The love of God as we see it in the compassion of Jesus Christ moves us to commit ourselves to support and participate in people's struggle. This means that we must commit ourselves to help the people recover and develop their own genius and power. That is, we need to take seriously such issues as those of land, appropriate technology, people's power and people's organization, development of local leadership, and wider network of solidarity and support. All this for the sake of combating the threats of death posed by the various forms of the monopoly of wealth and power on the one hand, and recovering the power of life promised by God on the other.

We recognize different contexts of the churches' presence in the world; those contexts partly determine the agenda for action by the churches. This is part of their mission, being sensitive to and learning from the respective contexts.

We also recognize that the churches respond to their respective contexts in terms of their different traditions. As they have become related to one another they have begun to challenge and learn from each other to become more relevant to their social contexts.

In the light of the problem of participation discussed above, the churches need a critical self-examination of their own life and work, relationships and structures, so as to discourage the tendency towards elitism of leadership. They should seek to practise authentic participation so that their witness will become more credible and effective. For example, the complementarity of roles and functions of the clergy and the laity should be heigthened; participation of women, youth, the disabled and other marginalized people should be promoted. There is need to re-examine the life-style of both the clergy and the congregations.

The churches need to be more faithful to their mission to the world, sharing the sufferings and aspirations of the people, even where the people may play no active role in the life of the churches. The witness of the churches should be relevant to the total life of society.

The churches must transcend their confessional and national boundaries and be in dialogue with people of other religions and ideologies for mutual challenge, sharing and learning.

Finally, the churches need to support the people's struggle for justice, human dignity and social transformation. The experiences and insights of many churches of the poor in recent years have been a challenge and an inspiration, not only to other churches but to the wider society as well.

Given the above understanding, the challenge facing us today is: how do we move in order to structure and guarantee people's participation at all levels of our life and work? In various ways, the programmes of the World Council of Churches are meant to respond to this challenge.

4. Methods and strategies of participation

Based on the discussions which took place during the Cyprus consultation, the following points were noted as ways in which people express themselves in search of authentic participation:

a) Joining various existing organizations or structures, such as trade unions, peasant committees, action groups, political parties, etc.

b) Protest and mass mobilization: in the face of unbearable injustice and exclusion, people are moved to protest and to search for alternatives. Demonstrations, strikes, walk-outs and various forms of people's protests are examples.

c) Quest for truth, for example, exposure of the illusion that participation exists when in fact it does not exist, exposure of failures and lies of those in control, publication and various pronouncements on certain pressing issues of unjust acts or situations.

d) Creating space for participation, such as easing the burden of people so as to free them to produce and to contribute to society (child care facilities, adult or informal education, etc.)

e) Involvement in revolutionary movements in order to overthrow the unjust regime is a form of political participation at a very high level and at a very high cost.

f) Participation in the various forms of communal celebrations, with the eucharist as one of the highest religious symbols of participation.

The consultation also considered strategies to promote people's participation. The following points were among the most noteworthy:

a) Motivation for action and participation is most effective when the people themselves, their interests and aspirations, are at the centre of attention. This includes cultural and spiritual values as well as economic gains and political participation.

b) Awareness-building and communication through concrete involvement, authentic information (as opposed to misinformation and deceit), employment of peoples language and folk symbols, people's telling their own stories, and the recognition of their wisdom.

c) Participatory leadership is of the people, for the people and by those who identify with the people. Potential leadership exists among the people, and needs to be developed.

   Authentic leadership promotes people's power, and motivates and inspires them to become shapers of their own history. True leadership is participatory, ready to be replaced.

d) Empowering the people through the recovery of their cultural roots, their wisdom and their identity.

e) Wider network of support and solidarity is of crucial importance for people's struggle for participation.

f) At the deepest level, people's participation is rooted in the religious vision. The cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ have evidently been one of the most powerful inspirations of people's movements for participation.

V. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As already apparent from the preceding sections, a number of methodological approaches were operative at the Cyprus consultation. In fact, the various contributions to the consultation embody different methods, implicitly or otherwise. Through the discussion, however, it became clear that the shift towards a people-centred approach has clear methodological implications. Questions were raised as to the adequacy of the action-reflection method which has prevailed in the ecumenical movement in the last decade or so.

The JPSS Advisory Committee already indicated the need for a new and more adequate methodology, which, they said, "should take the following elements seriously:

(a) the historical, cultural and religious heritage of the people;

(b) the contemporary power structures of human society;

(c) the commitment of faith to search in hope for the messianic kingdom where justice and fullness of humanity (life) will be realized".

These elements were affirmed at Cyprus. As the ecumenical movement continues to participate in the search for a just society, the question of methodology also needs careful attention. It should be noted that in the course of the consultation at least four basic methods emerged. They are simply outlined here, with no order of priority, anticipating a careful follow-up in the future. Notably, these methods have a lot in common in spite of the fact that they have emerged in response to particular contexts.

1. An ethic of responsibility. Articulated by some European participants, this method discerns the following essential points.

a) Political ethics is fundamentally an ethic of responsibility. The question here is how to bring together convictions within the framework of conditions in which political actions are to be taken and with the foreseeable consequences of those actions.

b) The method of political ethics has itself to be participatory. It is not enough to construct political ethics without the participation of the people who are themselves deeply involved in politics, in political experiences and in political struggles for participation and justice. Only when its method is participatory can political ethics be at the same time a matter of conceptualization and of orientation towards concrete actions.

c) Political ethics is one example for a dialogical procedure in ethics. This requires stepping over given social, cultural and religious barriers. It is a basic element of political ethics to bring the "genius of other historical, cultural and religious traditions into the discussion" (cf. Annotated Agenda).

d) An ecumenical political ethic should be reflected in the life of the churches themselves. In fact it is through the re-ordering of their own economy, structure and involvement in mission and witness that the churches can win credibility for the political ethic they advocate.

2. Participatory action research method. Articulated at the consultation by a Latin American participant, this method has been developed by a critical school of social scientists associated with some specialized agencies of the United Nations. Commonly referred to as PAR (Participatory Action Research), this method focuses on the context of and active involvement in the struggle.

The key to this method is a call for theology to overcome its isolation, not only from political and social sciences, but also from people's life and the way that people understand it. This method, therefore, is a combination of context, life, values and non-negotiable assumptions. More specifically, it responds especially to the needs of the people, taking into account their aspirations and capacities for knowing and acting. It seeks to promote self-reliant development from below and relative independence from outside.

This method rejects any absolute value in scientific knowledge, positing that such value varies according to the interests of the classes involved in the shaping and accumulation of knowledge. Positively, it considers popular science or popular wisdom at the base of society to be crucial to people's empowerment in their struggle.

3. Paradigm of reading a text. Articulated by some North American participants, this method focuses on the interpretation of symbols. What, this method asks, in the totality of human dwelling, is taken as the subject matter for interpretation? It posits that the text for political ethics is the people's story or social biography. The people's story is a praxis, an historical-political struggle for liberation from suffering and oppression. "People" is therefore a central symbol in the work of political ethics.

Three moments of interpretation or reading are the essence of this method:

a) Guessing or discerning: This refers to the fundamental sense or meaning of the central symbol, the people. For example, in the Cyprus consultation, the liberation of the people is the paradigmatic sense of the story.

b) Explanation: As a people recovers selfhood, it assumes responsibility for its story, for reshaping its future in its own terms. The explanatory moment means the tracing of the patterns of oppression, points of leverage in the system of oppression, and strategies for extending the people's participation in shaping its own future. Various analytic models may be useful in tracing the sequence of oppression and liberation, but no model or style of analysis can lay claim to finality. In this sense, social scientific, ethical and theological styles are all embedded in ideological projections which distort as well as illumine possibilities of justice, peace and participation. Here, the wisdom of the people provides the one sure resource for creative ethical work. For the people are the bearers of the possibility of overcoming oppression in the name of justice and peace.

c) Comprehension: This refers to the moment when those doing political ethics are consciously grasped or appropriated into the world of the people, sharing their plight and participating in their struggle for justice and liberation. The crucial question for political ethics here would be how the religious

community and its institutions can contribute to the political responsibility of the people in shaping its future. Lending a supportive hand as well as providing a critical and prophetic voice within the struggle of the people are two primary ways of action.

4. People's story. Articulated by some Asian participants, this method is based on the insights gained from the struggles of Asian people. Four closely related elements are central to this method:

a) Search for the messianic Kingdom: Faced with abject poverty and systemic oppression, and inspired by the "new heaven and the new earth", the people are engaged in the struggle for a just society.

This struggle is at once political and religious; yet the two dimensions are not identical. The religious refers to the deepest dimension of being human, as persons and in community. It refers to the human experiencing of the sacred. As such, it is an authentic spirituality, a full consciousness and expression of the divine dimension of human experience. The political, from this perspective, refers to the realization of the religious vision in human history, involving the exercise of power in order to combat the forces of death and to create conditions and structures for human fulfilment.

b) Reinterpreting and recovery of heritage: In search of their identity, poor and oppressed people reinterpret and recover their historical roots, their cultural and religious heritage, their collective memory and their folk wisdom, at the national as well as the local level. These sources of identity are embedded in significant historical epochs, foundation myths, folktales or folklore, and the arts and literature--in short, in the legacy of symbols which provide the living ethos for the people. In reinterpreting and recovering this heritage, the people are empowered, their identity established, and their destiny clarified. All this happens when people remember and retell the legacy of their scared history, sharing it with the new generations and with other peoples.

c) Articulating the present reality: Speaking their own language, the people reassert their humanity by telling the actualities of their suffering and oppression as well as of their hopes and dreams. Here people say "no" to the demonic forces, and "yes" to the power of life, not without ambivalence. Storytelling in this perspective at once embodies the articulation of the reality, social and political analysis, projection of strategies for action, and dreaming of a just world. This articulation, furthermore, is an integral part of people's doing their political ethics.

These two dimensions, the recovery of the roots and the articulating of the suffering, provide the people with an excellent political education.

d) Sharing the cup of suffering and joy: The three dimensions above are in fact part and parcel of people's sharing their suffering and joy. Yet, the act of solidarity, expressed in common action and celebration, constitutes the final link in the circle of people's story-telling method. Together these four dimensions are but a mode of people's search for a just, participatory and sustainable society.

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It should be reiterated that the above four methods, incompletely articulated as they are, were examples only. Other methods, perhaps as many as the number of participants, were also operative at the consultation. It seems clear that as the dialogue on political ethics continues, efforts are needed to ensure that these various methods are more fully articulated, recognizing both their diversity and particularity. More important, attempts should be made to spell out their common elements which may serve as a common frame of reference for our future work.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Ecumenical political ethics

1. We recommend that the dialogue on the issue of political ethics be continued. The following areas should be further explored:

   (a) forms of political participation going beyond representative democracy;

   (b) violence and nonviolence in the struggle for social justice;

   (c) an ecumenical exchange on different understandings of the term "people";

   (d) the use of the biblical tradition in making ethical choices;

   (e) the integrity of the Christian commitment in response to the plurality of political positions;

   (f) a deeper study on the issues of freedom, equality, participation, justice/equity, human rights/righteousness, and peace/shalom as integral parts of political ethics.

   (g) an exploration of the political potential of the ecumenical community, going beyond power politics, in realizing a just, participatory and sustainable society.

B. Justice and Power

2. We have experienced that churches do not share the same methodology of analysing political problems. Therefore, we recommend that the WCC through its appropriate sub-units clarify and articulate how churches do political analysis

Appendix

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